

Fishtales, Saturday, September 29, 2012
Working Waterfront Festival

Interviewer – Markham Starr
Interviewee – Sarah Schumann

MS What is your name?

SS My name is Sarah Schuman

MS And where are you from?

SS Warren, Rhode Island.

MS And is your family in fishing at all?

SS Not at all. My dad taught me to go quahogging when I was about six, but just recreationally. Just for clam bakes sake. Not for money.

MS And how did you get into, involved at all in fishing

SS Well, originally when I got involved, it was a very round about way. I was in Chile, actually, and down there they have 60,000 miles of, or 60,000 fishermen and three or four thousand miles of coastline so there's lots of artisanal fishing that takes place from 20 to 25 skiffs and I sort of fell in love with it down there and then came back to Rhode Island and kept pursuing it.

MS What were you doing in Chile? Did you go down...

SS I was just exploring. I was 19 or 20 years old and I wanted to see the world and that's where it took me.

MS And then what are you doing now?

SS Well, I now I have my own commercial shell fishing license in Rhode island so I do some shell fishing. In particular, I like to explore utilization of lesser known species like razor clams, periwinkles and slipper snails. In part, that's because I think that we should be using a wider array of the species that are available in our waters to keep the ecosystem in balance. But the other motive for exploring underutilized species is that it's harder and harder for young people to get into fishing because the licenses are so cost prohibitive so one of the ways that I've been able to find my niche is by targeting those species that are, nobody else is targeting. So it's something of an uphill battle because you have to convince people to eat them. So I do a lot of, a lot of handing out shellfish at various different events to interest people in consuming things like slipper snails and periwinkles.

MS So you started to tell me a little bit about sea sickness. This was the first trip? Was that the experience where you got seasick?

SS Yeah well we were talking about the first time, my first trip on a commercial fishing boat. I had just finished college and what I wanted to do with my degree in marine affairs was to get a job on a commercial fishing boat. And I was lucky enough to know a woman down in Point Judith, Andrea who works at the bait shop to put me in connection with a boat that she thought would be a good place for a bright eyed, bushy tailed young woman to get a job on her first commercial fishing boat. And so I did and the first day out I was desperately, desperately seasick. But I didn't want anyone to know about this because I felt so compelled to prove myself, not only as a novice, but as a woman and so I had twice the incentive to make sure that nobody knew how much I was suffering and I'll never forget how much, how desperately I wanted to go back to shore. But I managed not to tell anyone and after that it got easier. It's only the first trip.

MS What was the boat?

SS The Sandra Lynne, a lobster boat in Point Judith

MS Was that offshore lobstering?

SS No day trip, yeah. We'd go out to Block Island.

MS Pretty hard to hide seasickness

SS I don't think anyone suspected until we got, until we got back in and at that point I stopped trying to [laughs] contain my seasickness and I, it became apparent to everyone at that point that I had been suffering, but at least I made the impression and was able to get through the day and stack and bait all the traps that I was supposed to so I was invited to come back.

MS Did you stay with him?

SS Yup

MS How long did you fish with him?

SS For, off and on for years. For a least a year then and then would fill in at other times.

MS Did you do any other fishing on other boats there?

SS I worked on another lobster boat too after that.

MS Never on any draggers or...?

SS No and then actually that same boat the Sandra Lynn then converted to gill netting so I worked for last summer actually gill netting on the Sandra Lynn.

MS Well that's great. Thank you.

SS Thank you.